

STATUS REPORT OF FRANCE

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ABSTRACT

The actions of public authorities to improve road safety in France have three orientations: drivers, roads and vehicles:

- For drivers, the actions involve chiefly training, which is seen as part of an educational continuum starting in school and continuing throughout the driver's life: this priority is reflected in the strengthening of the partnership with the Ministry of National Education, and in the development of post-license training programs and the reform of the driver's license test.

The desire to mobilize all parties involved has led to communication efforts in the form of a national campaign and local actions.

Also, controls and penalties demonstrate their usefulness and the necessity that rules be respected.

- The safety of infrastructures, the improvement of road signs and information for drivers are also important factors in improving road safety.
- The last orientation, technical regulations for vehicles, should further improve safety and also increase aids for driving using means of information as well as systems such as speed limiters that can be adapted by drivers.

These actions are only possible thanks to the development of a better understanding of accidentology and through strong local policies aiming at involving all State services and local communities as well as many associations in areas well beyond road safety in the strict sense.

INTRODUCTION

The French Government has developed a strategy for improvement of road safety. This strategy involves several actors which are working together in an organised program with clear objectives in the areas of road safety policy, information and communication, local and national partnerships, driver education, road improvements and vehicle safety.

This program has allowed to continue the decrease of road fatalities over time: more than 25% over the last two years, as shown on figure 1.

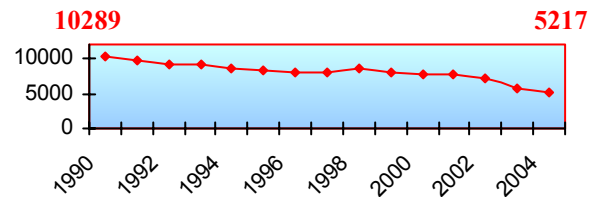


Figure 1. Evolution of road traffic fatalities in France over the past 15 years.

ACTIONS SINCE THE LAST ESV CONFERENCE

National Road Safety Policy

The Interministerial Committee for Road Safety meets regularly and had decided the following actions

- a/ Seeking to improve road safety through consideration of the draft law to reinforce efforts to prevent road violence and the signing of a decree concerning road safety and by the establishment of two working groups in charge of medical aptitude for driving.

- b/ Providing information and increasing awareness of responsibilities to develop a road safety culture involving life-long driving education (ASSR (school road safety certificate) and reform of written driver's license test), extension of the authority of local judges, launching of a promotion campaign for alcohol breath tests, registration of mopeds with the measure coming into effect in 2004 and by broadening the composition and the missions of the National Road Safety Council.

- c/ follow-up for decisions from the preceding CISR meetings: extending of the work of the two working groups in charge of evaluation of medical aptitude for driving, deployment of automated control system, drawing up of guidelines for reception of families of victims at hospitals.

- d/ broadening the mobilization through: the signing of the State/Insurance convention providing for the annual allocation of 0.5 % of third party liability automobile premiums received to road safety actions, organization in all departments of

departmental road safety meetings in cooperation with insurers.

Automated control-penalties

At the end of 2002 it was decided to deploy an Automated Control-Penalty System throughout the country. The objective set was to install 100 units in 2003 and 1000 before the end of 2005. 30 % of the units are mobile (on police and gendarme vehicles). The criteria used for choosing sites are: the frequency of accidents at the locations, an established link between the accidents and speeding in these areas, the difficulty of carrying out human police controls; for highway sites, the locations were chosen based on logical itineraries so that there would be the same probability of being checked anywhere on the highway network.

In order to make the system credible and efficient, it was decided from the beginning that the entire chain would be automatic.

The goal of transparency with respect to users was achieved through a communications policy on several levels: general public information to drivers concerning the installation of the systems; the map of the radars was published and is updated on the Internet sites of the Ministries of Equipment and of the Interior; brochures explaining the functioning of the automated control system were widely distributed; at all of the sites, radars are announced with specific signs; when they are put in service, communication actions are taken by local authorities in the various media; in order to answer questions from users, an E-mail box is available on the road safety site and a telephone hot line is available. As soon as the first radars were installed, speed levels dropped drastically at the monitored sites and in general on the whole highway system. There was a very sharp drop in the most extreme speeding. The next developments with the system will give priority to recognition of foreign license plates. For the 2nd phase of deployment in 2004-2005, systems will be installed to allow for monitoring of trucks. Experiments are now underway for the development of units to detect cars that run red lights, and that don't observe the necessary distance between cars, train crossings and bus lanes.

The main measures taken during the last two years concern:

- improvement of the control efficiency particularly of speed: widespread use of laser binoculars and automatic checks.
- increase in penalties for speed (immediate withholding of the driving licence above 40 km/ph),

alcohol (withdrawal of 6 points out of 12), seatbelts (withdrawal of 3 points out of 12);

- probationary driving licence for the inexperienced drivers that will only have 6 points for the first three years.

The new measures, studied or considered mainly within the National Council for Road Safety, concern:

- setting up of local observatories of behaviours concerning speed, seatbelt use and alcohol;
- traffic police;
- quality certification of infrastructures or, failing that, of infrastructure managers.

Finally, the alignment of the French definitions of a killed person and a seriously injured person on international standards (a killed person as a person, who died one month after the accident and inpatient), initially planned for January 2005, has been postponed probably for the beginning of 2006.

Local road safety policies and national partnerships

Departmental organization and regional efforts

In their joint circular to the Prefects on 30 January 2003, the Minister of the Interior and the Minister of Equipment requested that road safety be addressed in the framework of the new territorial systems for prevention and the fight against criminality: the Departmental Prevention Council, the Local Safety and Criminality Prevention Councils, the Departmental Safety Conference.

Departmental Road Safety Meetings

The Departmental Meetings gave State and local community representatives an opportunity to discuss the main factors involved in road safety with local figures and often to jointly choose priority actions.

National partnerships

The mobilization for the taking into account and prevention of road risks continued in 2003 between the various groups involved (CNAMTS, companies, insurers, prevention agencies) in various forms. Many associations benefited from subsidies from the DSCR. The Ministers of Health and Families issued a set of standards for working with families of road accident victims.

Driver education

Reorganization of driver's license test

A highlight of 2003 was the deconcentration within the DDE of the driver's license department and the reorganization of the driver-training department, which became the department of road education.

In 2003 several actions were taken for better training of drivers and more efficient monitoring of novice drivers within the framework of the driver's license test.

These actions were based on:

- an in-depth reworking of the general theoretical test, the contents of which were adapted to put the emphasis on the behavior of learner drivers with the idea of sharing the road with other drivers and calm driving;
- a major reform of the road test for the driver's license with a significant increase in the actual driving time to 25 minutes.

Lastly, in order to improve the safety of driver's license inspectors and road safety at test centers, a provision was introduced in the law against road violence to severely punish anyone who attacks an inspector.

Development of the educational continuum

This involves making sure that all young people, those in school, those who have left school, and those who have recently arrived in France, have received training in road safety and have acquired a minimum level of theoretical knowledge of road risks and rules applicable to driving before they begin driving motor vehicles. The following are now obligatory:

- ASSR (school road safety certificate) level 1 or ASR (road safety certificate) for signing up for practical training for driving a moped or a light four-wheel motor vehicle (voiturette) and the obtaining of a road safety certificate (BSR),
- ASSR level 2 or ASR for signing up for driver's license (car or motorcycle).

Provisional license

The legislative and regulatory texts for the establishment of provisional licenses for novice drivers have been prepared.

Roads

Improvement of road safety policies

The "road safety management and practices" project in testing since the end of 2001 allowed for the identification in 2003 of more than 200 actions and application of about one hundred actions in various sectors of activity of the deconcentrated Equipment Ministry departments.

Safety Control for Road Projects

Safety Control for Road Projects (CSPR) aims to improve the quality of new or renovated infrastructures. It includes three components: a quality approach so that safety is taken into account at all stages of projects, an inspection including a safety audit before the opening for service, safety appraisals immediately after the start of service and in normal use situations.

The first applications of this control - the audits before the start of service - were carried out in 2002 and 2003. They will be analyzed and summarized in 2004 in order to draw initial conclusions.

Flawless road signs

Several actions contributing to the improvement of the quality of road signs were carried out in 2003: consciousness-raising for elected officials and technicians and the launching of a campaign targeting authorities concerning the aptness of police signs.

Safety improvement on the national road network

The State-region contracts of the XIIth plan signed in 2000 include, in each region, a safety project developed from the regional safety development plans. The State's share of this project involves a cost of 134 million euros. With the contributions of local communities, this means that more than 300 million euros is devoted to safety work (more than double the amount for the XIth plan). Also, the amount devoted to safety developments through local initiatives, or 12.2 million euros per year, was supplemented in 2003 by an additional 3 million euros devoted to restraint systems adapted to motorcyclists. Lastly, a priority was set in these safety improvement programs on the national road network for dealing with lateral obstacles.

Intelligent transport

The ACTIF project, started in 2000, aims to develop a Framework Architecture for Intelligent Transport in France. 2002 and 2003 were turning points in the preparation for distribution: better promotion of ACTIF to its potential users, facilitating its use, implementing this use.

Actions started in the European programs SERTI, CENTRICO and ARTS were continued. They involved particularly: the application of cross-border traffic management plans, automated exchanges of DATEX data with our European partners, the deployment of a European road information Internet gateway and telematic systems and services on the trans-European road network.

Vehicles

In addition to measures taken in the area of public policy and infrastructure improvement, several measures in the area of vehicles safety were taken.

Technical regulations

The main regulatory texts of 2003 involve:

- obligatory wearing of seat belts in all vehicles equipped with them (extension to trucks and buses occupants)
- registration of mopeds,
- introduction of European car registration.

Technical inspections

In 2003, 17.27 million inspections including 14.87 million initial inspections were carried out in the 5,128 authorized inspection centers (4,633 specialized centers and 495 auxiliary centers). The 14.87 million initial inspections included 12.92 million for private cars and 1.95 million for light service vehicles. These results reflect a 2.2 % decrease in the number of inspections compared with 2002.

Day time running lights

The main new measure that has been recently implemented during the last few months, concerns the Day time running lights in open country in the form of a simple recommendation from 30 October 2004, knowing that an assessment device will be implemented to decide whether this recommendation is maintained or becomes an obligation.

SUPPORT TO RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

In addition to the above actions, the National Research Program for Road Transport (PREDIT) is supporting more research works in the area of vehicle safety; especially, within the group in charge of the area "Technology for vehicle safety", five research projects dealing with the protection of vulnerable road users (pedestrians and motorcyclists) are in place. These projects are not yet completed, however it is expected that the results of researches done within these projects will allow to improve the safety of vulnerable road users, especially two wheelers which are the users population with the highest risk. These projects are made in cooperation between public research and industry, and have links with European projects in the same area.

France continues to support the participation of research laboratories in European projects and European Networks of Excellence.

As member of EEVC, we consider that international cooperation in the area of preregulatory research is very important; we have accepted to chair

the EEVC and push the committee towards new goals: getting a legal status in order to become a formal organization, and developing new EEVC activities in the area of accident studies and virtual testing. Considering that improvement of vehicle safety becomes more difficult we believe that international cooperation is needed, and with the limited resources available worldwide it is important to avoid duplication and to use the best available expertises.

Taking that into account we consider that the technical content of new regulations and the improvement of existing regulations have to developed within WP29/GRSP. EEVC is the place to develop and make available research results which may be used at European level for improving regulations, however EEVC shall not be involved in the regulations drafting. Mirrored to EEVC at European level IHRA would contribute to the harmonisation of common interpretation worldwide of research results, facilitating future agreement on new or improved regulations. Taking the above statement France strongly support the EEVC activities and will continue to propose to EEVC new areas of activities to prepare the future of vehicle safety. We will also support the work of IHRA considering that it should be limited to areas not interfering with ongoing regulations; on the opposite IHRA outputs can contribute to GTR works, as it is the case in the area of pedestrian safety.